



The largely Romanesque Durham (left) and Salisbury (right), in Early English Gothic style, are two of some 20 cathedrals that were built by the Normans after 1066. At 123m, Salisbury's spire is the tallest in Britain



## LOWLY COMMUNION

The construction of the great Medieval cathedrals sometimes went on for centuries. Perhaps William Goringe had that awe-inspiring commitment in mind when, in the 1850s, he set about creating 27 miniature minsters out of cardboard and wood. In Canterbury's cloisters, Amicia de Moubray introduces a new exhibition devoted to the models of virtue. Photography: Bill Batten ▷



**THERE IS NOTHING LIKE** a good mystery in a cathedral close. For nearly a century an astonishing collection of 27 architectural models of cathedrals, some British, some Continental, has spent most of its time in the nether regions of Canterbury Cathedral, including at one time the wax chamber, where the vergers used to make candles. Here you'll find the great ecclesiastical buildings of Canterbury itself, Chester, Chichester, Durham, Ely, Exeter, Hereford, Gloucester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Norwich, Peterborough, Rochester, St Paul's, Salisbury, Wells, Westminster Abbey, Worcester, York, Amiens, Antwerp, Beauvais, Cologne, Milan, Notre Dame, Rouen and St Peter's in Rome. But how did these miniature marvels come to exist?

The origins of the models are obscure. The only clue is a label on the base of one, that of Gloucester Cathedral. It states: 'Under the distinguished Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Prince Albert. W. GORRINGE, Architectural Modeller, 3 King Street, Oxford, Begg to invite the attention of the Nobility, Clergy and Gents to his large collection of Models, consisting of the whole of

the Cathedral Churches of England... [They] are highly finished and form a very striking effect, being made to one uniform scale, and so arranged that the observer can at one view distinguish the different magnitude of each Sacred Edifice. Castles, Country Seats, Villas etc modelled to any scale.'

What is certain is that the models were presented to the dean and chapter of Canterbury Cathedral in 1916 by Edward Murray Oakley in memory of his brother, Sir Herbert Oakley (1830-1903), composer to Queen Victoria in Scotland, organist and Reid Professor of the theory of music at Edinburgh University. They were then exhibited in the crypt.

According to his brother Edward's biography, published in 1903, Oakley fell in love with Canterbury Cathedral when as a young undergraduate he used to stay with the dean and his wife, Mrs Lyall. 'Entrusted with the Dean's key,' Edward wrote, 'he loved to wander by moonlight through the glorious building, from Becket's crown to the west end.'

'One of the marvels of the age' is how an identical collection, then the subject of an exhibition in the Free Library at Putney, was described in an interview with Sir Herbert in ▷

Dating from the late 17th century, St Paul's was the first cathedral built specifically for the Anglican faith. It is therefore ironic that Wren employed the architectural language of the Counter-Reformation – seen in the model's dome and Corinthian columns especially

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*The Strand Magazine* in July 1900. The whereabouts of that second set is now unknown, but it was at that point owned by Sir George Newnes, the founder of *The Strand* and the first publisher of *Country Life* when it started in 1897.

Even *The Strand* writer was flummoxed by the scarcity of facts about the model maker: 'It has been a matter of extreme difficulty to gather details about the construction of these works of art, inasmuch as the maker, Mr Gorringe, late of Hales Road, Cheltenham, passed away somewhere in the [1880s]... Sir Herbert Oakley, the owner of the original set, very kindly allowed us to interview him as he is practically the originator of the main idea which led to the gradual construction of the models.'

Meticulously made out of a mixture of cardboard and wood, the models all conform to the same scale: 1 inch to 60ft. The surfaces are painted or coloured and use fine textural detail to imitate the building materials of the cathedrals – for example, slate roofs are scribed and masonry delineated. The minuscule size and the obvious care taken with the models, as well as their age, render them delicate and fragile,

which makes their survival all the more remarkable. Some of the models are now in a parlous state and in dire need of conservation. They are displayed under hand-blown Victorian glass domes of various sizes on turned wooden bases. Over time different-sized domes have been randomly plonked on top of the models regardless of their height, which adds a charmingly whimsical note to the overall appearance of the collection.

'The delicate accuracy of Mr Gorringe's art positively reveals in the minute, and evades the casual scrutiny of ordinary eyesight.' So wrote Edward Oakley at the time of his bequest. 'The fronts of Lincoln and Peterborough, for instance, almost require the magnifying glass; without it – like their originals under the unassisted eyes of some low-flying aeroplane – they must seem blurred, and miss their due effect.' He goes on: 'I may add that with hardly a pinnacle ruffled the models have safely survived the many long journeys they have made in following my brother's fortunes and my own.'

According to *The Strand*, Herbert Oakley's well-known music works, 'mostly of an intensely religious character, >

All 27 models – top step (from left): Gloucester, Westminster Abbey; bottom step (from left): Ely, Norwich, Lincoln – were made by William Gorringe at a uniform scale of 1 in to 60ft, and used to illustrate Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture*



have very naturally trained his mind to matters connected with churches and cathedrals the world over'. 'For the petrified music of architecture, indeed, [Oakley] had a peculiar aptitude, evinced in his Christchurch days by his beginning, whilst an undergraduate, to amass the unique collection of English and foreign cathedral models.'

It appears that William Gorringe made Sir Herbert's acquaintance at a very early stage of his undertaking the modelling, in specially prepared cardboard, of the best-known cathedrals of the world. This is where Sir Herbert's assistance came in; he amassed a fine collection of prints and paintings pertaining to cathedrals, which he lent to Gorringe.

At some point in the models' history, the architect Sir Banister Fletcher came across them, as some are illustrated in black-and-white photographs in his magisterial tome *A History of Architecture*. And it is to Sir Banister that we must turn again for the final twist in the story. John Burton, surveyor to the fabric of Canterbury Cathedral, was at a dinner of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters only recently when he found himself using Banister Fletcher's silver plate (tradition-

ally masters, as Fletcher had been, gave silver plates engraved with their name). 'It suddenly dawned on me that here was a connection with the models,' says Burton, 'particularly as Sir Banister Fletcher was the driving force behind the Craft College set up by the Carpenters in 1893.' Burton subsequently arranged for two of the models to be sent to the Carpenters' Hall for their conservators to examine.

The resolution? A programme of conservation is now planned for the models, one funded by model maker Hornby, whose global headquarters are based in Margate, which falls within the diocese of Canterbury. And with the miniature cathedrals being exhibited – in London, then in Margate – for the first time in over 30 years, though the mystery may not have been completely solved, the shroud has certainly been drawn aside ■

*'The Petrified Music of Architecture: Sir Herbert Oakley's Collection of Cathedral Models'* runs at Sir John Soane's Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2 (020 7440 4263; [soane.org](http://soane.org)), 5 April-25 June. To make a donation to the conservation of Canterbury Cathedral, ring 01227 865346, or visit [thecanterburygift.com](http://thecanterburygift.com)

Immortalised by Chaucer, Canterbury Cathedral has been a major pilgrimage site since Thomas Becket's murder in 1170. In the model (shown inside the cloisters of the original) Gorringe drew the line at attempting to replicate the famous 12th-century stained glass

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